

## Note of last Improvement & Innovation Board meeting

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**Title:** Improvement & Innovation Board  
**Date:** Thursday 31 January 2019  
**Venue:** Westminster Room, 8th Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

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### Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions
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<b>1</b>	<b>Declarations of Interest</b>
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The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. No declarations of interest were made.

<b>2</b>	<b>SLI Evaluation</b>
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Juliet Whitworth introduced the report, which updated members on the progress of the current evaluation of sector led improvement (SLI) and the emerging pattern of results at the half way stage. Juliet gave a presentation to support this and ran through the highlights of the report.

### **Discussion**

The Board welcomed the report and the positive findings in terms of the effectiveness of sector led improvement and support for the approach within the sector. Members discussed several issues, including:

- whether we knew, for those respondents to the LGA Perceptions survey who did not think SLI was the right approach, what they did think was the right approach;
- how the LGA understands whether CPC recommendations are taken forward. Given the effectiveness of CPC, whether consideration should be given to Lead Members and the Chair sending a supportive letter from the Board to encourage the Leaders of those councils that have not had a CPC, to have one;
- whether the improvement in performance indicators masks the impact the severe financial pressures on councils are having and whether CPC should be focussed on those councils we know are facing particularly tough financial challenges;
- whether in the final report we can explore further those areas where performance has fallen, to better understand the reasons why.

- how we ensure the capacity of the peers taking part in peer challenges. The Chairman responded that he believed the move towards political peers being decided by the political group office had reassured him of the quality of the peers.
- that it would be helpful to have an analysis of resident satisfaction results, by region – to explore any regional differences.

Dennis Skinner welcomed the members' comments and reminded the board that even if a council is not a member of the LGA, they are still entitled to grant funded improvement support. Dennis also stated that the take-up of CPCs was still progressing at a good rate but that the LGA was also encouraging those councils that hadn't yet had one, to have one. It was also important for the LGA's lobbying side and improvement work to continue to work together and give the same message in terms of funding cuts.

### **Actions**

Officers will act upon the member comments, while continuing the work on evaluation, with a 'final' report to be available in 2020.

## **3 Productivity Report**

Cllr Ron Woodley introduced the report, highlighting the progress of the LGA's productivity work in three areas:

### **Cyber Security**

The National Cyber Security programme, which is funded by Cabinet Office continues to progress. Members were referred to the presentation by RAND at the last meeting. Since then all councils rated as Red/Amber Red have been contacted directly. The chief executive and the leader's office were contacted to alert them to their assessment and to offer support. These councils have been proactively targeted to provide additional support/funding. As a result, 107 councils have now been offered support and funding in Phase 1 of just under £1m in total.

### **Procurement**

Members were informed that an initial benchmarking exercise with councils was undertaken during the autumn, which has identified areas where councils wish to further improve. These included

- contract management,
- strategic supplier relationship management
- measuring social value.

The productivity team will include activities to cover these priority areas in the forward plan for next year. Dame Judith Hackett will provide the keynote speech at the sixth national construction conference to be held here on 7 February.

### **Commercialisation**

Members were advised that there is an extra commercial skills masterclass for elected members due to be held in Manchester on 19 March. Cllr Woodley also updated on the “Profit with a Purpose” conference held earlier this month, chaired by Cllr Joy Allen.

### **Efficient and Intelligent councils**

Susan Attard, Head of Productivity, then updated members on progress with the Efficient and Intelligent councils project. Members were made aware that the first meeting of the Editorial/Advisory Board was taking place in the afternoon and feedback from them about the content of the self-assessment tool was requested at that meeting.

Further consultation and testing of the tool will take place during February and March, with a soft launch in April. Members were also made aware of the keen interest in this project from MHCLG.

### **Discussion**

The Chairman, took the opportunity to go through the report area by area, inviting comments from the board.

- Cyber security – the importance of ensuring that Leaders as well as CEXs were informed about the results of the cyber survey and the report for their council;
- Commercialisation – members were encouraged to access the presentations from the “Profit with a Purpose” Conference.
- Shared Services – Cllr Fleming advised that he has picked up some tensions/pressures from councils that their shared services arrangements were changing or no longer working. This was echoed by other members who picked up examples of arrangements needing/having changed.

Members agreed it would be helpful to look at the history of shared services over the last few years to examine what has worked well, where there have been problems, particularly where there are differing standards for services as a result of differing policies in councils. They were also interested in the risks of shared services and where tripartite arrangements have changed to dual arrangements. Members were interested in the changing landscape in this area and felt that it would be helpful to undertake some qualitative analysis to find out what has changed.

- Behavioural Insights – it would be helpful to establish an easy repository of the Behavioural Insights learning and tools so that councils can share and use the outputs more easily. For example, where the wording for standard letters has been changed – making it available easily so councils can cut and paste.
- Brexit – Cllr Allen advised members that her council had engaged in a

recent Civil Contingency exercise. She noted that the government assumptions had not been shared with all regions and that London had not been included. Dennis Skinner advised that a check list for Leaders was due to be sent to all council Leaders from the Secretary of State.

- Modern Slavery – Members were supportive and wanted to encourage more councils to publish transparency statements, whilst acknowledging that this is a voluntary requirement. It was suggested that this could be picked up through the Group offices.
- OPE – Members praised the OPE programme as a great achievement and were keen to draw attention to the success of this programme more widely. Members recorded a vote of thanks to Brian Roberts, the current director of OPE who was retiring.
- New ideas – officers were asked to consider whether to include the following issues in future programmes: overspend and severe budget pressures in top tier councils caused by education and school provision and how councils work with the Voluntary and Community sector, as councils budgets are reduced, the voluntary sector will be asked to do more and collaborative work becomes more important.

### **Actions**

Officers to follow up on the concerns and suggestions raised by the Board.

## **4 Presentation from Montagu Evans**

Alan Harris and Kevin White from Montagu Evans then presented to the Board.

Alan Harris presented to the board on the issues facing Town Centres. He noted the excitement around this area following the High Streets Fund, discussing the challenges of the digital economy, generation Z and decline in retail facing town centre. Alan spoke about creating a sense of place and developing a high street plan.

Kevin White then presented to the board on 'Commercial Investment - Investing for Income'. Kevin outlined the background in council commercial activity, including the increase in commercial spending over 4 years by councils. He then spoke to the board about how governance is key in spending decisions and how to balance the risk of such investments.

## **5 NGDP Diversity Update**

Helen Jenkins introduced the report, which as requested in the last Board meeting, gave a summary of the diversity statistics of the NGDP applications and gave an update on the work being done to improve and maintain representation within the NGDP recruitment. Helen also shared the latest figures from the Cohort 21, which had become available after

the report was distributed.

### **Discussion**

Members raised a number of issues during discussions:

- how we attract older applicants to apply for the scheme – there had been a slight increase in people with previous careers, and it was possible that work could be done to ask councils to consider internal staff for the scheme;
- Work done with individual local authorities – it was explained that local recruitment is an alternative option. Councils have the choice between national NGDP recruitment and a local scheme. The NGDP team at the LGA is currently supporting local campaigns;
- Whether there was a correlation between higher applications between good university and good authority at promoting scheme – where universities and councils work well together. Helen responded that this was likely and that councils could often get free stands at careers fairs at universities, which the LGA encouraged them to do.
- It was suggested that the pool of candidates who just failed to get through the process, but who got to the final stage, would be a good pool of people the sector should try to exploit. It was reported that discussions were underway with the HR team about what could be done with this pool of candidates
- Members stressed the importance of member involvement in welcoming graduates to their councils and remarked on the quality of the graduates. It was suggested that the test taken by NGDP applicants could be shared around Board members to demonstrate the level of difficulty in getting through.

### **Actions**

The NGDP team are to look into members requests and continue their work on diversity.

## **6 NAO study: Local government governance and accountability**

Dennis Skinner introduced the report, which updated members on the publication of the NAO study into local government governance and accountability. The NAO report acknowledged the significant reduction in local government funding over the last few years but said that some of the ways authorities had responded (eg large scale transformation programmes, etc) added greater complexity to local governance arrangements and had suggested that MHCLG needs to improve its oversight.

Members noted that despite the funding reduction just 8% of local government had received qualified value for money conclusions in 2017 – the same level as 15/16 – whereas in the NHS the number had risen from 29% to 38% across the same period. Many of the survey results in the

report were also positive about the strength of local governance arrangements. It was also noted that councils automatically fail the value for money judgement if they receive an inadequate Ofsted judgement, even though this is not an indicator of financial position.

It was suggested that further analysis of the survey results be undertaken to try to identify and support any councils where governance arrangements could be strengthened.

Dennis informed the board that the LGA Principal Advisors will be aware of the issues in councils across the country, including the 8% with adverse opinions and that the LGA is looking to strengthen its current finance offer and take-up.

## **7 SLI MoU Performance Report**

Dennis Skinner introduced the report, which provided an update on performance against the deliverables in the Memorandum of Understanding the LGA/IDeA have with MHCLG about the use of grant funding.

The Board noted the report.

## **8 LGA Boards improvement Activity**

The Chair introduced the report, which gave a summary of the improvement work of the other LGA Boards.

The Board noted the report.

## **9 Innovation Zone**

Lusi Manukyan introduced the report, which gave an update on the progress so far on the Innovation Zone and the Innovation Zone members working group meeting coming up on the 14 February.

The Board noted the report.

## **10 Note of the Previous Meeting**

The note of the previous meeting was approved by the board.

**Appendix A -Attendance**

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Peter Fleming OBE	Sevenoaks District Council
Vice-Chairman	Mayor Dave Hodgson MBE	Bedford Borough Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Ron Woodley	Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Members	Cllr Paul Bettison OBE	Bracknell Forest Borough Council
	Cllr Steve Count	Cambridgeshire County Council
	Cllr Charlotte Haitham Taylor	Wokingham Borough Council
	Cllr Laura Miller	Purbeck District Council
	Cllr Joy Allen	Durham County Council
	Cllr Phil Davies	Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Abdul Jabbar MBE	Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Vince Maple	Medway Council
	Cllr Liz Green	Kingston upon Thames Royal Borough Council
	Cllr Alan Connett	Teignbridge District Council
	Cllr Mike Haines	Teignbridge District Council
	Mr Philip Sellwood	Energy Saving Trust (EST)
Apologies	Clr Judi Billing	North Hertfordshire
	Cllr Donna Jones JP	Portsmouth City Council
	Cllr Damian White	Havering London Borough Council
	Cllr Tudor Evans	Plymouth City Council
	Cllr Alice Perry	Islington Council
	Cllr Glen Sanderson JP	Northumberland Council
	Sir Stephen Houghton CBE	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
	Mr Richard Priestman	Local Government Improvement and Development